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Stewarding Labour Market

Summary of findings

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Background

The UK is currently facing labour shortages across multiple industries. The latest labour market statistics from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) show that employment levels across the UK are now above pre-coronavirus levels, whilst job vacancies increased to a record 1.2 million in the three months to November 2021 (ONS, 2021). Falling unemployment rates and increasing vacancies are potentially contributing to the strain on the labour market, with fewer people available to fill roles.

As employment rates have risen, so has the number of people in temporary work. We have now reached a five-year high of 1.68 million temporary employees, although over a quarter of those (27.1%) would like a permanent job (ONS, 2022). The number of people working for gig economy companies (such as Deliveroo and Uber) is also now 2.5 times higher than in 2016, and there is evidence of people increasingly using this type of employment to supplement other forms of income (Trades Union Congress, 2021).

One of the industries traditionally reliant on temporary and casual workers which is feeling the impact of labour shortages is sports and live events, where there is evidence of a growing dearth of stewards and events personnel.

This research was carried out to provide a detailed description of the labour market for stewarding and event personnel performing comparable roles across the live events sector, including short-, medium- and long-term trends.

To address this aim, we conducted a desk-based review of existing data sources supplemented by qualitative interviews with senior stakeholders from across the sports and live events industry.

This summary report brings together the key findings from both the desk review and interviews.

Key findings

Stewarding population

One of the key barriers to addressing issues with a shortfall in stewards to meet industry demand is the lack of data on the stewarding population. Without a national register for stewards, there is no database to understand the number of stewards available to work and their demographics. It also makes it difficult to communicate effectively with the steward workforce, for example to check their competence, understand their experiences of the role, address barriers and provide incentives. Crude estimates include 12,000 to 25,000 stewards in Premier League and English football, and approximately 300,000 individuals with SIA door supervision licences, but neither of these figures represent the breadth of the steward workforce across the live events industry.

Steward training and qualifications

The spectrum of training for stewards ranges from those who obtain a SIA security licence or complete the national occupational standard in spectator safety, to volunteer stewards who may have no training or qualifications. Although recent changes to qualifications are widely perceived to have increased standards and quality of training, the cost to the individual of undergoing the training has also increased, and there are concerns that this acts as a barrier to take up.

Drivers of a shortfall

Another key issue highlighted in the literature and by industry stakeholders is the lack of value placed on, and investment in, stewards by employers in the industry. With some exceptions, stewards tend to be employed on zero hours contracts, paid little more than minimum wage, and offered short shifts and few hours in seasonal work. Furthermore, as they are typically not employed on permanent contracts, they receive little to no training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) from the industry. Stewards are therefore ill-equipped to cope with the ever-changing and demanding conditions and responsibilities of the role, which can include dealing with aggression from the public. The combination of these factors is considered to lead to a perception of the steward role as a stop gap or part-time role to supplement a main income, rather than a role that offers career progression.

Although these drivers of the shortfall in steward supply were present prior to COVID-19, the pandemic has exacerbated the problem. During lockdown restrictions, work in the sector dried up, forcing stewards to find work elsewhere. It is believed that some found work in other security or stewarding roles, such as at COVID-19 vaccination or testing centres, or outside of the industry in roles such as delivery drivers and retail. Having found pay and conditions (such as the number of hours available) more favourable in these other roles, encouraging these individuals back to stewarding is considered to present a significant challenge. Furthermore, the pandemic has created considerable uncertainty around whether events will go ahead when planned, leading individuals to choose instead to work in sectors with more reliable work streams. An additional impact of the pandemic (and perhaps Brexit) is that many stewards whose permanent residence is overseas are believed to have returned home, and it is unknown whether or when they will return to the UK to work.

Impacts of a shortfall

Not having enough stewards to staff events presents a significant public safety concern for event organisers. In attempts to achieve the numbers required to meet minimum safety standards, actors such as music promoters are working with an increased number of security suppliers, whilst companies are increasing pay to try and attract more stewards and events personnel. There is also heavy reliance on agencies to supply high numbers of stewards to sports fixtures and live events. There are concerns that agency staff are not as well trained, experienced, or capable as in-house staff. Further, when agencies struggle to find enough stewards at times of peak demand, unqualified and inexperienced staff are supplied, which presents a further safety risk at events. To address this problem, some organisations have started to recruit an in-house body of stewarding staff. Experiences of this model are reported to be positive, as in-house stewards are often better supported and invested in, which in turn improves recruitment and retention.

Implications for the future

Looking ahead to the next six months, there are significant concerns among stakeholders that the shortfall of stewards, alongside an unusually high number of live events scheduled for summer 2022, will create a 'perfect storm' which puts public safety and the ability for events to go ahead at risk.

Stakeholder recommendations

Stakeholders made a range of recommendations for how to address the shortfall of stewards. These included:

- **Improve working conditions for stewards**, including increasing pay and remuneration; investing in training, CPD, and staff welfare; offering more working hours, including full-time contracts; employing more stewards in-house; and, facilitating the movement of individual stewards across sports clubs and

other live events so that they can work more hours and the role can gain more credibility as a full-time job

- **Improve collaboration, communication and accountability** among the different organisations and actors across the sports and live events sector for meeting demand for stewards
- Reduce or subsidise the **cost of training**
- **Combine training pathways**, so that training equips individuals to work flexibly across different types of sports and live events
- **Create a national register for stewards**, perhaps via a digital platform on which individuals could register for training

Appendix A. References

ONS (2021), *Changing trends and recent shortages in the labour market, UK: 2016 to 2021*, available at:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/changingtrendsandrecentshortagesinthelabourmarketuk/2016to2021>

ONS (2022), *EMP01 SA: Full-time, part-time and temporary workers (seasonally adjusted)*, available at:

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Trades Union Congress (2021), *Platformisation and the Pandemic: Changes in Workers' Experiences of Platform Work in England and Wales, 2016-2021*, available at:

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